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## PANAMA.

*Reports from Colon—Inspection of vessels—Sanitary work—Vaccination.*

Acting Assistant Surgeon Mohr reports, August 15, 23, and 24, as follows:

Report on the sanitary conditions of Colon and vicinity for the two weeks ended August 13, 1904.

According to the official records there have been 17 deaths from the following causes: Fevers 3, dysentery 1, tuberculosis 1, pneumonia 3, cerebral anemia 1, heart disease 3, disease of liver 1, stillbirths 2, cause not given 2.

No cases of quarantinable diseases have been observed in this port, and in Panama no further cases of yellow fever have been reported since the case which was reported on August 1.

As the number of deaths as given appears rather large, it must be remarked in this connection that the population of Colon has been steadily increasing during the past few months, and the census which is now being computed will show a population of 7,500 to 8,000. This increase is due to the fact that numbers of Jamaican and other West India negroes have been arriving on every steamer from Jamaica and the South and Central American coast. The Royal Mail steamship *Atrato* alone last week brought 306 negroes from Jamaica, and the steamship *Orinoco* this week over 100. These immigrants are allured to the Isthmus by the prospect of work on the canal, but their coming is altogether premature, as it will be a year or more before any large number of laborers will be needed. It can not be too emphatically stated that all persons, excepting those having definite positions or employment assured them, should keep away from the Isthmus. Already the capacity for housing these people, both in Panama and Colon, is becoming a serious problem, and the cost of living is increasing. Owing to the heavy and intermittent rains anopheles abound everywhere, and these newcomers being unprotected, in many instances underfed, fall easy victims to malarial fever. Many of them, as well as many whites of the so-called "beach comber" class, of whom quite a number are collecting on the Isthmus, find their way into the poorly equipped charity hospital of Colon suffering from malarial fever and privation.

The sanitary department of the Isthmian Canal Commission has begun systematic work, under the direction of the chief sanitary officer of the Commission.

Under the supervision of a health officer, appointed by the chief sanitary officer, a house-to-house inspection is being made at Panama; streets are being cleaned, and depressions are being filled according to grades given by the engineers, with a view to preventing breeding places for mosquitoes.

The sanitation of Colon presents peculiar difficulties, and such improvements as can be made pending the engineering work must necessarily be confined to correcting the gross defects of public hygiene. What can be done in the way of draining lots and streets that have been neglected for years, cleaning away rubbish that has been accumulating from time immemorial, and clearing away the rank growth of brush and weeds covering the pools that breed abundant

mosquitoes all over the town, is being very energetically pushed forward by the health officer, who has been appointed by the chief sanitary officer.

A house-to-house inspection has been made, a census has been taken, and every effort is being made to introduce a reliable system of mortuary statistics. Under the present conditions it is difficult to arrive at anything like positive conclusions regarding either the morbidity or the causes of death, as the diagnoses given in the official records are either too vague or entirely misleading. For this the assistance of the local authorities and the cooperation of the local practitioners are necessary to enable the health officer to inquire into all cases of grave or doubtful nature, especially fevers, and to investigate all cases of death. A properly equipped morgue and plenary powers to the health officer should be essential features in this work.

I have not learned what plan has been decided on for the permanent improvement of Colon, but it will be an engineering feat of some magnitude. At this season of the year the greater part of the town is a morass, to which is added the accumulation of rubbish and filth of a population utterly indifferent to ordinary cleanliness. In order to obtain a proper grade for drainage and sewerage the amount of filling required will be something enormous, and I am told by competent engineers that some sections of the town would have to be filled 10 feet in order to bring the level only 3 feet above tide water. The better portion of the town, always excepting the railroad property along the water front, is bad enough, with the back yards under water, the pools of stagnant slime under the floors of even the best buildings, and the filthy cesspools; but those sections where the majority of the negro and native laborers live, in miserable shacks built on stilts over the swamp, simply defy description. To the casual observer the task seems an impossible one, and too much praise can not be accorded those engaged actually in the work of sanitating Colon.

An interesting feature of the sanitary work is that being done by the health officer of the Canal Zone, which consists chiefly of what has been very aptly termed "mosquito engineering." Wherever there are habitations located along the line, or sites for camps, systematic search is being made for mosquitoes, their species determined, and habits studied, in order to arrive at the proper methods to be pursued for their diminution, if not extermination. He informs me that anopheles are abundant everywhere. Quite a number of breeding places have been found on the hillsides in the Ancon grounds where the hospital is located, and all collections of water, especially where algæ grow luxuriantly, contain the larvæ. They have also been found in such sheltered places as the cups formed by the broad leaves of certain plants like the banana. Rarely, if ever, are the larvæ of this genus found in the containers around dwellings. An abundant species is the anopheles albipes which, the health officer is satisfied, is diurnal in its habits. In this connection it may be stated that I have been informed that one of the worst localities is Culebra, where the actual work of excavating is going on, and that malarial fever is particularly prevalent among the laborers there. Here the larvæ are found in all the pools and puddles on the terraces in the cut, a very significant fact when the amount of excavating to be done is considered.

In order to test the value and progress of the sanitary work in this direction, records of all cases will be kept and the relation of the num-

ber of mosquitoes, in any given locality, to the number of cases of fever will be carefully observed.

*Stegomyia* are to be found everywhere around human habitations and every tank, cistern, barrel, or other container, especially cast-away bottles and tin cans filled with water, harbor the larvæ in quantities. Even the puddles on the old abandoned dump cars at the stations contain the larvæ of this genus. Here of course the proper screening of all water containers and the clearing away of all neglected vessels will be rigidly enforced.

I hope to be able from time to time to personally observe the results of this work and to report on it.

During the week ended August 20, 1904, bills of health were issued to the following vessels clearing for ports in the United States:

British steamship *Senator* for New Orleans via Mexican ports, August 16, with 40 crew and 2 passengers; American steamship *Advance* for New York, August 17, with 61 crew and 56 passengers; Norwegian steamship *Ellis* for New Orleans via Bocas del Toro, August 20, with 32 crew and no passengers.

#### *Vaccination in Panama—Circular.*

Five deaths were reported for the week ended August 21, 1904, and the causes given as follows: Fevers, 3; phthisis, 1; stillbirth, 1.

Of these, 3 were native Panamans, 1 was a Jamaican, and 1 a Chinaman.

The influx of Jamaicans and other West Indians continues, despite the fact that the Panama Government has imposed an immigration tax of \$2 per person. In order to prevent the introduction of smallpox an ordinance regarding vaccination has been passed and promulgated by the chief sanitary officer, copies of which I herewith transmit. The Isthmus has been remarkably free from this disease since the epidemic which prevailed along the coast in 1903, at which time vaccination was very generally practiced. In the British West Indies vaccination has long been compulsory.

With the exception of Limon, Costa Rica, the conditions on the coast of Central and South America have been very favorable this year. All vessels coming from the coast ports now bring bills of health signed by the consuls of the United States, and from none of these ports, with the above exception, has yellow fever been reported. Since the inauguration of the isthmian quarantine service agents and masters of the various steamship lines are exercising the greatest caution in complying with the quarantine regulations promulgated by the Isthmian Canal Commission.

#### *Vaccination circular.*

[Inclosures.]

[Under the authority granted by the Governor's announcement of June 30, 1904, and governed by the Panama Código de Policía, article 539.]

Ordinance No. 11—Department of sanitation—Vaccination of immigrants.

Every person entering the Canal Zone, by sea, to reside in said zone, shall, prior to such entry, present satisfactory evidence of protection